



Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Paul E. Hoffman

Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 11, 2020

Matthew 22:1-14

Has it ever happened to you? Have you ever been just doing what you are supposed to be doing, minding your own business, getting the job done, perhaps, or relaxing, or you could even be rushing to get in just under the wire. It can happen to you or to me in most any circumstances. But it happens when we least expect it.

He didn't even know he was supposed to have a special wedding garment. All the servants had said was come to the wedding party. It sounded a little suspicious all right. But once he got under the tent it seemed like there were lots of folks just like him. A little bewildered about why they were there, but awfully delighted about the whole thing. Until now. Until this very moment. Until just when the King happened by and seemed to dump the anxiety of the ages out on him. Can't you just hear the voice inside his head? Why me? Why does stuff like this always have to happen to me?

Or maybe, maybe you relate better to the one who is dishing it out. I know I've done it, and I don't think I'm all that unusual. You can't even explain it. It's almost like you're embarrassed for yourself while you're doing it. If you were watching yourself in a movie, you would be the guy you'd hate. For some reason all the anxiety and pressure and confusion of the day wells up and then some thing happens. Some little, tiny, insignificant thing – like a guy wearing something other than a wedding garment. And boom. You really unleash it on someone.

It's not a very tidy little story. It doesn't make any sense. The King is hurt that no one comes. Then he invites people in. Then for no good reason at all, EXCEPT THAT THIS IS HOW PEOPLE TEND TO BEHAVE, he randomly kicks one poor soul out. Out into the utter darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now the traditional way of seeing this parable has always been to imagine that the King is God, and then the whole thing is a pretty stern warning that if you happen to show up to where God is without your wedding robe, you'd better watch out.

Except that doesn't really work, for all sorts of reasons. First of all, we don't believe that God gets enraged, like the King was. We don't think of God as one who goes around destroying people and burning their cities. And we don't worship a God who randomly and unreasonably throws people in the dark, weeping gnashing places, there to leave them lost, lonely, and bereft. That view of God just doesn't work.

It's NOT a very tidy little story. It just doesn't make sense. And perhaps that's exactly the point. When has it ever made sense when someone has inexplicably unloaded on you? More to the point – when has it ever made sense that you have unfairly lit into someone else? Oh, it might make sense for the moment. It might even at some dark place in each of our personalities feel good for a while to get things off our chest. But when you stand back and look at it, it really isn't very tidy, or sensible, or COMPASSIONATE to really let someone have it.

I have a feeling things being what they are these days – an ongoing pandemic, financial worries, election anxieties, worsening poverty for many, family dysfunction, job insecurities – you name it – I have a feeling that things being what they are these days, there are lots and lots of people unloading on one another for no apparent reason. Even more than normal. It's not a very tidy little story, this human matrix of relationships in which we find ourselves. It just doesn't make sense. Precisely.

As is so often the case with the stories of Jesus, it's important to our understanding of them to find where Jesus IS in the story. And believe me, Jesus is not walking around inside the party tent kicking people out randomly because he doesn't like the clothes they're wearing.

The Christ we worship is the one walking the outer streets of darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Christ we worship is the one weaving amid the lives of people who are often both the victims and the perpetrators of things that just don't make sense. Jesus is determined to live among us. Deep among us. So deep that the hits and the hurts and the habits of everyday life are healed by his presence. He is determined to live so deeply at the core of human congress that by watching him, and knowing him, and loving him there is hope that the perplexity and pain we inflict on one another and have inflicted upon us will be brought into the bright light of day and be redeemed.

It's not a very tidy story, is it? One mean and powerful man, disappointed and dejected himself, randomly taking out his anger and frustration on the defenseless. Not very tidy, but oh-so-true. It happens every day. And not just to other people. It happens to us. Sometimes we are even the ones who make it happen.

And into those dark and shameful corners of our lives comes Christ. With a new garment for us to wear, a new celebration for us to join, a new way for us to be. It just doesn't make sense. But it is the Gospel. And it is true. And it is free. And no matter how bad it gets, or how loathsome we become living inside our own anxious and fearful disappointed human skin, Christ lives there with us. Deep, deep in our human flesh. Ready to make all things new again.

In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.